

Centre for Applied Social Sciences



**Proceedings of the
Regional Conference on Gender Issues in
Community-Based Natural Resource Management
C B N R M
(Cresta Lodge, Harare : 24 – 27 August 1998)**

Compiled by

Nontokozo Nabane

September 1998

University of Zimbabwe

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Gender Sensitive Development At Community Level:

Experiences from Botswana, Swaziland and Zimbabwe.

Titus Moetsabi

ABSTRACT

Gender sensitive development in Southern Africa is characterized by both negative and positive trends at Community level. This is because gender sensitivity has been incorporated in development initiatives largely as an agenda for Northern NGOs and therefore essentially as a conditionality of technical and financial donor assistance. This top-down approach has not only been patronizing, haphazard and unsuccessful; it has also been alienating because the values it has sought to impose are Euro-centric, basically western and urban which have no significant relevance to the rural context of peasant women and men in Zimbabwe, Africa. By attempting to remove one form of oppression through another form of oppression, this strategy has been characterized by civil disobedience, as an anti-domination strategy, at community, extension worker and organizational levels that have successfully led to the failure of development activities following this line. On the other hand, there have been organizations which have initiated dialogue, as facilitators, at community level on gender sensitivity. This has been done through a multi-track communication strategy which involves the community themselves sharing knowledge and exchanging experiences on the kind of egalitarian development objectives and activities they aspire to achieve. The interface of community and change agents relations has been characterized by information, education and communication among the peasants themselves and, between the peasants and outside change agents. The result has been that the dominant perception, of what kind of gender sensitive development takes place, has been that of the peasants themselves, local cultures specific and friendly, enabling and empowering. This approach has been sustainable because it is revolutionary as the community defines its agenda and mobilizes itself in alliance with internal and external friends.

SOME DEFINITIONS USED IN THIS PAPER²

Gender: Socially constructed roles ascribed to males and females. These roles are learned, change over time and vary widely within and across cultures. Whereas biological sex identity is determined by reference to genetic and anatomical characteristics, socially learned gender is an acquired identity.

Gender sensitivity: An understanding and consideration of the socio-cultural factors underlying discrimination based on sex, whether against women or men.

Gender relations: The relative position of men and women in the division of resources and responsibilities, benefits and rights, power and privilege. The use of

² The Tribune, A Women and Development Quarterly, Newsletter 56, p.29. April 1997.

gender relations as an analytical category shifts the focus away from viewing women in isolation from men.

Gender policy: An organization's policy that integrates gender issues into the entire spectrum of its activities. The policy also designates responsibility for gender integration through mechanisms such as gender training and gender guidelines.

Community: A group of women, men and children living within a specific area, sharing common resources, having homogenous and heterogeneous interests. In Southern Africa the community at rural level is mostly African, Black peoples. These are the peoples I will refer to in this paper. Contrary to being a 'type' as most of us sometimes 'see' them, rural communities differ according to their different local cultures. However, each of these communities has values, social organizations and indigenous technical knowledge which collectively interpreted as representatives of that group, sensible and rational. Thus in this paper, I am referring to intelligent peasants whose rationality is inherently sound as a way of negotiating a particular socio-historical context without the need to be compared to any other. These are the communities involved in Community Based Natural Resources Management.

1. Negative Trends and Impending Factors to Gender Sensitivity in CBNRM at the Interface of Co-operation between Outsiders and Rural Communities

1.1 Disregard for Ubuntu/Unhu/Personhood

Ubuntu³ is a metaphor that describes the significance of group solidarity on survival issues. Ubuntu is central to the survival of African communities, who as a result of their poverty and deprivation have to survive through brotherly [*and sisterly*] group care. This practice of collective assistance is not peculiar to Africa alone but a characteristic of most dispossessed groups all over the world. The cardinal belief of Ubuntu is that a person can only be a person through others. In its most fundamental sense it stands for personhood and morality. The key values of Ubuntu are group solidarity, conformity, compassion, respect, human dignity and collective unity, which are contrary to many European values. These undermined values, structures, strategies and processes ought to harness Ubuntu values into a dynamic transformative force for reconstruction and development in Africa. Lovemore Mbigi, argues that the assimilation of Western culture has not been successful. Africa needs to draw on its triple heritage from Africa, the East and West. The starting point should be our own roots if we are to meet the challenges of development and reconstruction, hence development. As Amílcar Carbral, the leader of PAIGG, the nationalist resistance movement of Guinea-Bissau, says:

A people who free themselves from foreign domination will not be culturally free unless, without underestimating the importance of positive contributions from

³ Ubuntu, *The Spirit of African Transformation Management*, Lovemore Mbigi with Jenny Maree, pp 1-2, Knowledge Resources, 1995.

the oppressors' culture and the other cultures, they return to the upward paths of their own culture⁴.

The Ubuntu management approach aims at the following outcomes:

- The development of co-operative and competitive people
- The development of co-operative and competitive paradigms and perspectives
- The development of co-operative and competitive practises
- The development of co-operative and competitive processes
- The development of co-operative and competitive policies and procedures and the development of competitive values as well as institutions⁵.

While it is true that certain aspects of culture are negative, having evolved customarily to deal with socio-historical era problems in particular, my contention is that **people** in rural communities have established coping strategies in interaction with their communities that are sustainable and as valid as they are ancient-tested by time. Rather than impatiently lump all cultural aspects, we need to identify these 'upward paths of our own culture' to emphasize equality of division of resources and responsibilities, benefits and rights, power and privilege in relations between men, women and children in CBNRM.

1.2 Monocultures Discourse

Gender sensitive CBNRM is both a means and an end, **which** can be accomplished by a multi-disciplinary, broader political, economic and socio-cultural agenda. In Biodiversity, Social and ecological perspectives, Vandana Shiva, Patrick Anderson, Heffa Schucking, Andrew Gray, Larry Lohmann and David Cooper⁶ argue that the roots of the crisis of genetic erosion lie in the industrial system of the North. They also refute the notion that biodiversity conservation can only be achieved if commercial interests are used to 'value' genetic resources. The authors argue that Third World peasants and forests dwellers have been the guardians and beneficiaries of the worlds' biodiversity. They warn of emerging biotechnology that will erode biodiversity by increasing uniformity in production, imposing intellectual property rights to turn life forms into private property.

The questions that need to be asked are who owns CBNRM? Who controls it? Who makes decisions because if it is not the people themselves then there is a problem. No excuses should be given for the equal participation of women and men in CBNRM by themselves because they have the capacity to manage. As one Mosarwa man once said to me in the Kalahari, "The lion and myself are brothers and so you do not need to take me away from my brother nor to teach me how to stay with him". In my ten years of development work, I have experienced CBNRM, which we singularly supported as

⁴ Quoted in Ibid., p.5-6

⁵ Quoted in Ibid., p 10

⁶ Biodiversity, Social and Ecological Perspectives, Zed Books/World Rainforest Movement

1.5 Over-emphasis of Participation at the Expense of Leadership

Men and women are encouraged to participate in CBNRM programs, and this normally succeeds. After participation in most of the programs I have been involved in, I have gone back and found women marginalized to the periphery of decision making, networking, community and ownership. Gender sensitive development must rise above participation and position leadership by women along side their male colleagues. This has to be a long term strategy with training, information and education components to give them the capacity to lead.

1.6 Poor Communication

It is now an established fact in development circles that a lot of development programs fail because of inadequate or absent communication. Inadequate communication can be institutional, interpersonal and intercultural. The communication modes applied to rural development are by and large adopted from western and urban forms rendering them irrelevant and inappropriate for the rural context. Where communication is absent, in the sense of interactive, dialogical discussion, ignorance characterizes this absence.

In the case of Chinyamatumwa Irrigation Scheme, our research established that contrary to the planners' view that the project was helping the community and empowering them, the community said the Irrigation Scheme was a different farming system, which they were not used to. They therefore felt trapped, disempowered and they were being laughed at and described as stupid by other members of the community who remained in dryland farming.

This often happens with CBNRM programs as well. Some CBNRM programs are very beautiful on paper, but the impact at household level is minimal for the women and children due to poor communication between the change agents, planners and the communities themselves. It should be noted that gender-sensitive development alone rarely leads to empowerment and capacity building. It should go hand in hand with training for transformation and this dual approach needs to be backed by highly skilled and committed extension support. Poor capacity at national or organizational level with regard to gender sensitive staff. This often results in poor planning of gender relations in programs and people can feel very bad afterwards. This is also characterised by emphasis on women or the tools of gender analysis rather than why the exercise is being undertaken.

Gender sensitive development means more money, more work, more training- this has to be recognized if it should lead to frustration and uncompleted activities due to shortage of funds. Inferiority complexes, which have been perpetuated by colonisers as a survival strategy (and by most independence regimes bent on extending their rule through hook or crook), have created the impression that literacy, rather than the spoken word, is education and, this leads to discussions being dominated by people of high authority. This is also demonstrated by lack of confidence in villagers' abilities and knowledge, particularly women. Political influence is sometimes not supportive of local peoples' empowerment. Sometimes the extension staff or change agents have been trained to use empowering methodologies such as gender sensitive approaches but the systems in the organizations or higher government departments do not recognize the results of bottom up planning. During the PRA in East Hanahai, the community came

with their CBNRM plan, but the plan that was printed in the central government national district plans was the one done by extension workers on behalf of the community, instead of the one the community themselves had done.

2. Summary

Gender sensitive CBNRM in political, ideological, economic, socio-cultural and environmental terms involves sharing power. The history of power has rarely been one in which it is given freely, it is either seized by force or through negotiation between oppressed and oppressors. The triple structural oppression of women by men at community level, patronising donors and central government policy calls for radical alternative strategies, if both women and men are to benefit from the CBNRM activities. Some of these strategies are referred to below.

Positive trends and enabling factors to gender sensitivity in CBNRM at the interface of co-operation between outsiders and rural communities:

1. Support for a gender sensitive approach at the top of organizations. This involves integrating gender relations into community-based organizations' mission and mandates. The CBNRM program in this case creates a gender policy with an activity plan, which has funds committed for its successful implementation. Gender is also taken into account during monitoring, evaluation and strategic planning with a view to equally empower men and women¹². Where this strategy is taken by the community-based organizations' priority interacting partners, then an enabling context is created for gender sensitive development.
2. The community-based organizations dealing with CBNRM get its management, including the board, in the development of gender policy, consulting with staff on gender policy implementation, and valuing the opinions of outside groups and people such as consultants, community groups and politicians, and donors. An organization culture evolves in which the language used, jokes and comments made, images and materials displayed actions taken around sexual harassment and women in leadership positions all demonstrate that the organization itself as a separate persona is gender sensitive.
3. The organization structure of the CBNRM program makes an effort to get tasks and responsibilities concerning gender issues to be clearly understood. All staff are made to participate in decision making, men and women, equally. The organization structure with time exhibits a team approach between its women and male staff.
4. The CBO human resource policy treats men and women doing the same work equally in terms of wages, appraisals and so on. The attitudes encouraged are those which make staff open to new ideas and innovations. There is a realization that as long as there is gender sensitivity, there is a long way to go because they is always room for improvement.

¹² The Tribune, Number 56, p 31.

5. There are definite lessons learned in East Hanahai, Kedia, Motokwe, Khekhenye, Tswaane, (**Botswana**) Binga, Gokwe, Nkayi, (**Zimbabwe**) and Nzongomane (**Swaziland**) about CBNRM which is planned from a gender sensitive point of view using PRA:
 - different skills are needed to facilitate gender sensitive mobilization and awareness than those of mere message delivery
 - the role of the extension staff changes from that of teacher to facilitator
 - joint learning takes place and generates trust and respect
 - research and message development becomes user friendly
 - gender sensitive participatory development is a social and political process, raising awareness and creating demands
6. Therefore, gender sensitivity, particularly from a participatory planning point of view is important but methods are not enough. The approach includes a philosophy, the what and why, and forms the basis of embarking in gender sensitive development. The strategy is the how to get there. All stakeholders have to be on board. The methods are not the objective, they are the means to facilitate implementation by the CBNRM collective. The system is the unit within which it all takes. For all this to be empowering and make a difference, the actors working with the community need to be skilled and believe in it wholeheartedly. Successful gender sensitivity to the conceptualization, planning, implementation and evaluation of CBNRM is a unification of methods, organization and content¹³.
7. Gender sensitive facilitation of the development process. During an exercise in Lepokole¹⁴ it proved to be difficult for the facilitators to direct themselves to men and women equally even though the extension staff had been trained. In the exercises where women did not have a two thirds majority, the men clearly dominated the scene. The facilitators did not manage to involve the women more. According to the report, "It will take some time before all officers become gender aware and manage to involve both genders equally in discussions. Gender awareness facilitation has to be consciously included into CBNRM training curriculum and more exercises need to be done with men and women separately to give them the perception of women equal recognition".
8. Flexibility. Integrating gender sensitivity into structures of development is not an event - it is a process, which needs careful strategizing and time for implementation.

¹³ Christine Frischmuth, The Experience of Participatory Extension Methods and the Zambian Participatory Extension Approach, GTZ-PAS, Lilongwe, Unpublished monograph, July 1997

¹⁴ Engitar Tazelaar and Scholastica Williams, for Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, Botswana, Development through Partnership in Lepokole, p 43.

1. Summary

For CBNRM programs to be gender sensitive in their design and casting, a lot of communication enhanced training is necessary of all players in the program. The community should of necessity access positive aspects of their culture to respect and ensure equal leadership by women and men together as a team. Outsiders working with the community must guard against 'quick fix' solutions as these are likely to alienate the file from the rank, as well as the rank, and file from themselves. The CBNRM experts are the people in those programs and not the facilitators from outsiders. Donors have their hidden agendas, and so the community should never expect charity of philanthropy from them. Rather, the community needs to create its own hidden and open agendas as part of its coping mechanisms and strategies in dealing not only with donors but all outside agents coming to work with them. Gender sensitive development has to be contextual to specific local cultures and the African condition, especially the African family.



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